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ARTICLE

The cases of the European Values Study and the European Social Survey—European constellations of social science knowledge production

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Abstract

This article is a comparative analysis of the European Values Study (EVS) and the European Social Survey (ESS) using five analytical dimensions: agents, ideas, methods, institutions and context. From the outset, both surveys were closely connected to national and European social science institutions, had ties to the EU, and used survey techniques to address urgent contemporary political and social problems. Despite their similarities, the surveys represent two rather different constellations of social science knowledge production. The EVS emerged from a coalition of Catholic-oriented agents from a diverse set of social institutions driven by political and ethical concerns about social change in the 1960s and 1970s. The EVS used its links to various social institutions to set up and run the survey, and its ethical and political concerns and connections to Catholic Church organisations continued to play a significant role in its constellation. The ESS grew out of a scientific and technical aspiration among well-connected and recognised Western European social scientists. It emphasised rigorous methods and drew on its founding agents' close relations with European institutions such as the ESF and the European Commission

Keywords

European Social Survey, European Values Study, Social Surveys, Europe, European Social Science.

Introduction

This article analyses the social history of two European social surveys in order to understand historical changes in social science knowledge production in Europe. Specifically, I compare the European Values Study (EVS) and the European Social Survey (ESS) using five analytical dimensions. The article shows how the people, ideas and the social context of the surveys—both narrowly understood in terms of networks and ‘local’ institutions, and in terms of wider social changes—interact with and co-shape the organisation and content of social science knowledge production. Since the two social surveys were initiated almost twenty years apart, the comparison allows me to not only account for differences between them, but also to point out important aspects of how the constellation of European social science surveys has changed.

Social science and social surveys have, since their invention, been closely entangled with political claims, aspirations and struggles over institutions and classifications (Bulmer, Bales, and Kish Sklar 1991; Converse 1987; Igo 2009; Porter 2003). Social statistics have played a major role in the development of modern states’ capacities to control and govern societies, and various statistical tools have contributed to constituting modern bureaucracies as powerhouses for regulating modern societies. Using social statistics, social scientists and public bureaucracies have been able to measure, compare and identify social problems and characteristics, and target political measures at specific groups, areas and institutions (Bourdieu 1994; Porter 1995). The power of social statistics has been their apparent objectivity and neutrality in depicting the social. However, as with any other knowledge product, we can also approach social statistics as a symbolic product that has the potential to transform the social reality it is designed to describe (Desrosières 1998). Following the insight that statistical knowledge about society is the product of a constellation of political and scientific forces, I analyse how constellations of social science knowledge production at a European level have shaped our knowledge about European societies. The case study presented here thus provides new knowledge about the constellation of social statistical knowledge production at the European level adding insights to our knowledge about national systems.

More specifically, my analysis of these two cases addresses two central questions in this special issue. First, the article describes the construction of the social science surveys and the different, changing conditions for knowledge production. Second, the two cases can be understood as examples of the emergence of a European field of social science research. Thus my analysis reveals not only historical changes in the constellation of social survey knowledge production but, through the comparative analysis, I also show how two different types of social survey knowledge generation became institutionalised as significant modes of producing knowledge about Europe.

The article is structured in four sections. First, I present the theoretical framework and the two cases. In the second and third sections I analyse the two cases and the fourth section is a concluding discussion.

Constellations of Social Surveys

This article compares the development of two European social surveys in order to understand their different trajectories and constellations. I use the concept of ‘constellation’ to denote how ways of thinking, specific techniques and tools, institutions and people entangle in a specific pattern of social science knowledge production (Fourcade 2009). In order to account for the constellation of the two surveys, the article follows a five-pronged methodological approach comprising agents, ideas, methods, institutions and context (Fleck 2015a, 2015b). Using these five perspectives, the article

addresses different levels of analysis as well as various activities in social science knowledge production. As such they offer a robust analytical framework for structuring the comparison.

First, the article looks at the *agents* involved. Much history of the social sciences has focussed on individual thinkers, their trajectory and social and intellectual development. I also draw on a prosopographical approach, that aims to describe the agents involved as a social group characterised by age, numbers, educational background, professional trajectory, positions and access to various social resources (Broady 2002; Fleck 2011). Second, the article analyses the central *ideas* guiding the two projects. It studies the idealistic heritage of the projects, as well as their political and scientific ambitions (Kauppi 2010). Connected to the analysis of ideas, the article proceeds to analyse the *methods* applied. Much history of the social sciences addresses big ideas and consecrated theories and theoreticians. However, the mundane techniques and methods with which we create knowledge about the social world are crucial in order to understand the trajectories, success and failures of social science endeavours (Desrosières 1998; Platt 1996). The fourth analytical dimension is *institutions*. To conduct large scale transnational social surveys, research institutions—such as university departments, public and private institutions—play a major role in financing academic projects, providing organisational frames for them, and legitimising them politically (Bourdieu 1988, 1998). Finally, the article analyses the *context* of the two surveys. Here, I investigate relations between political agents and institutions, especially how broader political and social concerns and conflicts were translated into social science questions and projects, both in setting up the projects and during their completion. The concept of ‘context’ is undoubtedly the hardest to define since it aims to capture large-scale and long-term changes in the social conditions under which the projects take place. Especially in an analysis like this, covering more than a generation of scholarly work, the context changes during the process. In the analysis, I address each of the five perspectives one by one and, in the conclusion, I discuss how they are interrelated.

The paper analyses two European social science questionnaire surveys: the European Values Study (EVS) and the European Social Survey (ESS). These surveys are two of the most widely used social surveys in Europe and are quite distinct from the Eurobarometer¹ inasmuch as they are academically driven. Thus, the two cases provide an opportunity to understand the formation and structure of European social science projects. Within the field of survey research, both surveys have come to be recognised as providing high quality data, and for their contribution to the field of survey methodology (Bréchon 2012; Heath, Fisher, and Smith 2005; Jowel et al. 2007). The EVS was initiated in the late 1970s and its first waves were launched in 1981, with successive waves in 1990, 1999 and 2008. The next is currently being prepared for 2017. In 1981, the EVS covered the Western European countries. Since then, the EVS has expanded, and by 2008, it covered 47 countries in Europe, including most of the former Soviet states. Thematically, the surveys focus on values, with questions ranging from religious and moral issues to the environment, politics and society, family, and over time has included an increasing number of socio-demographic questions. The first wave of the ESS was conducted in 2002, and it has been conducted biannually ever since. It covers most of the EU member states, but has also been conducted in Iceland, Russia and Ukraine. The survey consists of a permanent module and a rotating module. The survey focuses on social policy issues, political and moral attitudes in the core module, while the rotating module concentrates on shifting central themes that are often related to the social problems of the European welfare states (e.g. ageing, migration, family and justice). In 2012, the ESS was established as a European Research

¹ The Eurobarometer is a biannual social survey conducted by the European Commission since 1974. The purpose of the Eurobarometer is the provide knowledge about public opinion one political issues for the European Commission.

Infrastructure Consortium. The two surveys were launched twenty years apart and that difference will, of course, influence the analysis. I regard this difference in time span as an opportunity to understand both the contemporary differences and historical changes in the production of survey knowledge in Europe.

Table 1: Overview of the cases

	European Values Study	European Social Survey
Creation	1981	2002
Number of waves	Five (1981, 1990, 1999, 2009, 2017 (in preparation))	Eight (biannual since 2002)
Countries covers	13 in the first wave increasing to 47 in 2008	Between 20 and 31, mainly Western Europe
Central topics	Human and moral values	Social and political attitudes

The analysis draws on interviews with central agents in the two surveys, as well as on documents ranging from descriptions in grant applications through the survey websites, to technical reports and academic publications. The interviewees were strategically selected in order to represent different periods, positions and tasks in the two surveys. The interviews were conducted both face-to-face and via phone, and were subsequently transcribed.

European Values Study

At first glance, a striking feature of the EVS is how much it has changed over time. A simple explanation for this is that the project covers an entire academic career span. Hence, the agents who launched the EVS in the mid-1970s are now gone, and the researchers who joined the ESV as young scholars in the late 1970s and early 1980s are now well-established professors who are about to retire and hand over the survey to younger researchers. All in all, the long-time span of the survey admits many opportunities for changes in all aspects.

AGENTS

The agents involved in the first phase of the EVS came from different backgrounds and institutions and brought together not only academic assets and expertise, but also resources from politics, business and various Catholic Church organisations. In the late 1970s, the Catholic theologian and priest Jan Kerkhofs, and the sociologist and rector of the Catholic University in Tilburg Ruud de Moor, initiated a study group about values and social change in Europe. They gathered well-connected agents around them, mainly drawn from the Benelux countries, the UK, Germany and France. The group consisted of people like the founder of the Eurobarometer, and former secretary of Jean Monnet, Jacques-René Rabier, David Heald, a devout Catholic and the UK head of Gallup (who carried out the Eurobarometer), Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann, former president of WAPOR, visiting professor at the University of Chicago and closely connected to German Christian Democratic parties, and professor Jean Stoetzel, the first president of WAPOR and one of the agents who imported Gallup to Europe after World War II. Thus, the agents involved in the EVS had not only an ‘academic’ interest in the subject of values and social change, but also strong political concerns and connections. Three aspects linked the founding agents of the EVS. First, they shared a connection to the Catholic faith and institutions. Second, they were associated with survey methods and international survey organisations, and third, they shared a centrist or Christian-conservative political outlook (Interview with British researcher in the two first rounds). In other words, the

project was established on a conservative foundation, both scientifically (drawing on the consecrated methods, theories and paradigms) and politically.

Over time the constellation of agents involved in the survey has changed, and today most are researchers from universities or research institutions like GESIS, the German data archive for the social sciences. When the second wave of the survey was launched in 1990, many of the original members had already been replaced by academics. This was the result of an active strategy pursued by the academics in the survey's governing bodies, with the intention of strengthening the survey's academic reputation and anchoring it in academic institutions (Interview with member of the executive committee). Of the current national programme directors, the majority are university professors or are connected in some other way to academic institutions. However, this immediate impression—stemming from the directors' official positions—obscures huge differences, especially between Western and Eastern European countries, most notably the former Soviet Republics, which reflect major differences in the national organisation of higher education. In the 1990s, the EVS recruited programme directors and survey organisations throughout Eastern Europe through its connections to church organisations, different private research organisations, ministries and national research institutions. Thus, many of the researchers involved in the EVS were not only academically interested in values and social change, but also used the EVS as a vehicle to position themselves and their institutions within their country (Interview with Eastern European program director). In the Western European countries, connections—especially to Catholic Church organisations—were maintained through financial support for the EVS and the association with Catholic universities. All in all, despite the apparent changes, the agents still constituted a heterogeneous group with connections to various social fields and institutions, with reasons for participating other than 'purely' academic ones.

IDEAS

The ideas guiding the EVS were, of course, closely connected to the people involved and their trajectories. Thus, the core concern of The European Values Systems Study Group in the late 1970s was social changes triggered by social movements, migration and secularisation, and the changes in family patterns that had characterised Western societies in the 1960s and 1970s (Arts and Halman 2014). More politically oriented concerns included the effects of European integration in the light of very different national 'value systems'. Not only were these themes interesting and relevant from a social science perspective, they were simultaneously the concern of church organisations and conservative political organisations, which monitored the social changes in the 1960s and 1970s with both fear and anxiety (Kerkhofs 1991). Thus, running through the survey was an ethical concern, informed to a very large degree by a Catholic Christian outlook. As one of the researchers involved explained:

...there was also a quite Catholic orientation to this. Gordon Heald, head of Gallup, was interested in Christian issues and Kerkhofs was a Catholic priest. ... It was not a political agenda, but rather a concern driven by an ethical standpoint. In general we were criticised a lot by other academics. They were dismissive of the European Values Survey for not being fairly grounded in strong sociological premises. Which was true, since the project consisted of different elements struggling to make sense. (Interview with member of the British team in the first two rounds)

These ideas were transformed into items in the first questionnaire, which contained 355 items divided into seven different areas. The seven areas were: perception of life, with 95 items (27 %); work 38 (11 %); family 49 (14 %); politics and society 43 (12 %); religion and morals 90 (25 %); and sociodemographics 34 (10 %). Among the questions was the now famous Rosenberg question about general trust (Question 208) and Inglehart's post-materialism scale. Questions on religion and morals were prioritised along with questions on perceptions of life, reflecting the importance of religion in the group's perception and its concerns about the erosion of moral, and especially religious, values in Europe. But there were also new questions based on the group's concerns, such as a question about the Ten Commandments (Question 208). In other words, societal concerns—of political, social and religious kinds—played an important role in defining the EVS and in shaping the basic questionnaire.

Over the years, other issues and ideas have become part of the survey and its justification, but the concerns underlying the initial surveys still inform the questions asked and the framing of the results. Thus, initial anxiety about changes in moral values and their consequences for Europe and European identity still inform key publications (Arts, Hagenars, and Halman 2003; Arts and Halman 2014). Over time various events—such as the end of the Cold War, the introduction of the Euro and the financial crisis of the 2000s—have marked the different waves of the surveys and have led to publication addressing events such as values changes in Russia and Eastern Europe and secularisation processes (Ester 1997; Halman and Riis 2003; Halman and Voicu 2010). Perhaps the most important change, however, was the survey's move away from being 'issues-driven' towards becoming a 'research infrastructure' providing high-quality data about Europeans' values. From the third wave in 1999 onwards, the production of data became more important, and data quality and practices related to that concern came to challenge the original constellation of the EVS, as will be seen in the following section.

METHODS

As we have already seen, the central agents responsible for setting up the survey were all, in one way or another, institutionally committed to the questionnaire survey format as the primary mode of producing knowledge about social issues. The method was taken for granted, with issues about quality and documentation only becoming salient in the later period of the survey. In its first years, ethical and political concerns were the driving force in developing the project. This can be seen in two ways. First, many of the items in the first questionnaire were existing items that the team collected from various sources and incorporated into the EVS questionnaire. In itself, this was ordinary practice in survey research, but in the case of the EVS, it meant that there was little homogeneity in measures, scales and formulation throughout the questionnaire. Second, the practical application of the survey was left to Gallup, which drew on organisation and experience gained from running the Eurobarometer (Harding 1986).

Since the late 1980s, methods and documentation have become more important. In the 1980s, while preparing the second round, Ruud de Moor recruited researchers from the Methodological Department at Tilburg University to the survey. One of the researchers explained how survey methodologists regarded the EVS in the 1980s:

... The main group of people working with [the EVS] were the ones in the marketing area. This resulted in many isolated questions on different topics; and they never thought about scaling and reliable measurement. They seemed to think that you could ask people about how religious

they are the same way you would ask them about the butter in their fridge... (Interview with Dutch methodologist)

Thus, improving the quality of the technical part of the surveys has been a major concern. This quality improvement process targeted three areas: the questionnaire; the sampling; and documentation.

In the preparation of the second round (1990), the questionnaire as a whole, as well as single items, were already being reconsidered and a number of questions were replaced or reformulated. Over time, the trend has been to introduce more socio-demographic questions and to ensure consistency in scales and measures. This was not an easy task, however. First, because of comparability, it is always a delicate issue to replace or rephrase questions in repertory surveys. But in the case of the EVS, the organisation of the survey further amplified this problem. As a central researcher recalled:

One could propose an item, and then get overruled several times because of not very convincing arguments, like threats that people would leave the project, if certain items [they were using in their research] were left out... A major problem in EVS is that there are people who are interested in politics, or in religion or a third domain, and all of them fight for their own items.... They do not care about the measurements or the questionnaire as a whole. (Interview with member of the Executive Committee)

Thus, the questionnaire was negotiated in the Council of Programme Directors, a diverse group of researchers with very different academic backgrounds, quality criteria and research interests. Simple technical criteria were often decisive.

The second methodological issue for the EVS was sampling and fieldwork. In the first round (1981), the EVS relied on Gallup's methods, network and expertise. Practices varied hugely, with some countries using random sampling, others quota sampling, and there is very little documentation about dropout rates or any other aspects of the fieldwork (Ashford and Timms 1992; Harding 1986). These problems were not remedied in the second rounds conducted in 1989 and 1990. The members of the EVS shared a keen interest in obtaining data from the former communist countries, an interest that overshadowed concerns about the fact that that data had been collected in haste by Allensbach in Germany with little documentation or time to build up national survey organisations (Interview with member of Executive Committee). However, from the third wave onwards, one of the main priorities at the EVS team in Tilburg was to ensure homogeneity in sampling procedures and fieldwork. During the third and fourth waves, random sampling was introduced, despite resistance from some country programme directors due to costs and national traditions.

Third, from late 1990, the EVS began to document the survey more thoroughly. Since the late 2000s, the EVS has been facing increasing demands for documentation and quality control (Halman 2001). The EVS could not change how the first waves were collected and documented, so their strategy was to try to meet the increasing demands by relying on documentation and 'reconstruction' of the steps taken in earlier surveys. However, since this documentation of the surveys was done more than twenty years after completion of the fieldwork, it was not always easy, or even possible, to obtain information about sampling, fieldwork or other relevant parameters.

The increasing attention to measures, fieldwork, sampling and documentation also reveals how the priorities within the EVS changed over the course of the survey, with increasing attention given to more technical issues of survey knowledge production.

INSTITUTIONS

The EVS emerged out of a coalition of—predominantly Catholic—universities, Catholic Church organisations, Christian Democratic political think tanks, private opinion polling institutes and the European bureaucracy. Thus the survey grew out of political institutions and, as I argued earlier, this influenced the initial concerns that guided the survey. During the first round, the EVS relied heavily on contacts and funding from Catholic Church organisations and Christian Democratic think tanks, as well as on access to Gallup's survey organisation in Europe. In other words, the EVS was established at the intersection of different social institutions or fields, and it was not until the late 1980s that the survey was anchored within a university department. Only in the 1990s did the survey become dominated by academics. As one researcher explained, discussing the first survey:

There was some confusion about what is this creature EVS and who should look after the first wave? Ruud de Moor raised his hand and agreed to take it on. There was not really any competition over who wanted to have the responsibility, but rather that Tilburg in the end agreed to assume the responsibilities... De Moor probably thought that it was good for Tilburg and its sociology department to be in charge of the EVS. There were a few researchers from Tilburg who were really interested in the first wave and had the quantitative capability. (Interview with member of British team in the two first rounds)

In this way, the EVS became institutionalised at a particular academic institution and within a national sociological framework with a strong tradition in quantitative methods, even though the institution in question was marginal within the national sociological field (Becker and Leeuw, 1994). Over time, the survey's connection to academia and universities has been strengthened and the institutions that form the backbone of the EVS today are all academic institutions.

As many of the founding members withdrew from the surveys, and in order to strengthen its academic reputation, the EVS attempted to formalise its organisation and build relations with recognised academic institutions. Thus, in the late 1990s, the EVS became associated with the German data archive GESIS and, during the organisational formalisation process, universities from Eastern and Southern Europe were incorporated into the different working groups and executive committees. The collaboration with GESIS (and its predecessor ZUMA) had a long history. The formal collaboration started in 2002, when GESIS took over as the archive for the EVS datasets. From then on, GESIS took on the job of archiving and documenting the data, not only for the 2008 wave, but also reconstructing the documentation for the first three waves (Interview with member of the German EVS team).

On an organisational level, the EVS had evolved from initially being a loose organisation located at the intersection between academic, political and civic society institutions, to being a more formalised organisation anchored primarily in academic institutions. However, the ties to the institutions crucial in establishing the EVS were not severed. Thus, collaboration with, and funding from, church organisations continued to be important well into the 2008 wave.

CONTEXT

Seen from the perspective of social scientists, one of the most attractive aspects of the EVS data is the long time span it covers. With the first wave conducted in 1981, and a new one coming up in 2017, the EVS data provides knowledge about attitudes and values ranging from the introduction of democracy in Spain and Portugal, through the fall of the Berlin Wall, to the introduction of the Euro

and the financial crisis in 2007. Thus the EVS data represents a potentially important resource for understanding major changes in Europe over almost the last forty years. On the other hand, all of these major social events are entangled with the survey throughout all its stages, including the questions asked, countries included, methods applied and, perhaps most importantly, how the results were framed and interpreted. As already shown, the EVS was located at the nexus of various societal institutions from the very outset. One of the main concerns when setting it up was the future of European integration, especially economic and political integration in the EEC. Through Rabier and Kerkhofs, the EVS was connected to the EEC and its Brussels bureaucracy (Kerkhofs 1991). Despite this, the EVS never received any support from the EEC, except for symbolic recognition (Interview with member of Executive Committee). However, the concern about European integration stayed with the EVS, and around the time of the second wave this became an important aspect when the surveys expanded into Eastern Europe. As one of the Polish researchers recounted: “Yes, it was the slogan [...at the time...] that Poland should come back to Europe...”. Hence participation in (Western) European research projects like the EVS was framed as a part of the ‘integration of Europe’ after the end of the Cold War. The way in which the context shaped the survey varies widely between countries, however.

During the whole project, this concern about European integration and its connection to political and social changes framed all waves of the survey, ranging from its social settlement to the ways in which it was framed and legitimised, as well as practical problems pertaining to data quality. In the publications from the EVS, broad changes in the political and social context are used to justify the survey. As one of the publications resulting from the second wave stated:

The 1990 survey was carried out around a time of considerable potential and actual political change. Countries within and around Europe were beginning that process that has now resulted in some of the most sweeping and extraordinary changes within living memory. The demise of the Communist system of government in the USSR, the fall of the Berlin Wall and re-unification of the East and West German States, the rise in nationalistic fervour among the Baltic states, and the imminent abolition of trade barriers between member countries of the EEC are all changes which affect the lives of Europeans at some level. (Ashford and Timms 1992: 4)

Thus, EVS researchers used the changing social and political context continuously to update and frame their research.

European Social Survey

We now turn to the ESS, which was launched in the 1990s; the first round of interviews was carried out in 2002. It is, in other words, a much more recent social science endeavour than the EVS. In the following sections, I will analyse the European Social Survey using the same five dimensions.

AGENTS

Whereas the agents who initiated the EVS came from different social fields, those who founded the ESS were predominantly well established North-Western European academic researchers with strong ties both to national and European social science institutions. These leading researchers not only had experience in conducting social science research at the national level, but had also been involved in different ways in several international survey research projects. Intellectually, they all

played a central role in debates in European sociology and political science about stratification, comparative politics and political attitudes; they subscribed to the techniques of social surveys and the theoretical foundations of post-war US social science (Steinmetz 2007). These properties become clearer if we look more closely at three of the agents who were central in setting up the ESS. Max Kaase played a crucial role in setting up the ESS. Before setting up the ESS, Kaase had directed and participated in a number of highly visible European projects in comparative politics (Barnes and Kaase 1979; Kaase and Newton 1995). Here, he not only gained experience with directing large-scale European social science research projects, he also developed connections to European scientific institutions like the European Science Foundation and like-minded scholars, especially in Northern and Western Europe, through institutions like the European Consortium for Political Research and the European University Institute in Florence (Boncourt 2015). One of the researchers he was connected to via the ESF was Swedish sociologist Robert Erikson, co-authoring *The Constant Flux* with John Goldthorpe (1992). Erikson was recognised for his research on social stratification, but he also played a central role in coordinating European sociological research through the European Consortium of Sociological Research (1991) and its flagship journal the *European Sociological Review* (1985). He also had connections to the European Science Foundation and to the European Commission as an advisor on social issues. The last agent I will present here brought much experience of carrying out and administering large national and international surveys to the ESS. Roger Jowell was a British social scientist who had headed the British National Centre for Social Research since the early 1980s and had been instrumental in setting up the British Attitudes Survey in 1983. He also developed and chaired the International Social Survey Program (ISSP) in its first years (Smith 2012). It was these technical and administrative capacities, alongside his abilities for obtaining funding for various projects, that Jowell brought to the ESS.

The researchers initiating the survey drew on their extensive networks and connections to researchers throughout Europe. Most researchers recruited to serve as national coordinators were well-established and controlled resources and institutions in their home countries within university departments or governmental research institutions. Scientifically, researchers with a strong methodological focus dominated the group, reflecting a key concern for the ESS, namely the quality of survey research in Europe.

IDEAS

From the outset, the main idea guiding the ESS was not rooted so much in a specific social concern, political idea or specific theoretical framework, as in the ambition to produce high-quality data for comparative social science research and to improve and standardise the quality of survey research in Europe, thereby advancing social science knowledge. The idea guiding the ESS was, in many ways, in line with the post-WWII constellation of social science, or what Steinmetz has called ‘methodological-positivism’; i.e. the belief that social science knowledge could be advanced by increasing the amount of empirical data and refining empirical techniques in order to avoid bias and measurement errors (Steinmetz 2005). In the twenty years prior to initiating the ESS, Kaase especially had been involved in comparative research projects and had gained first-hand experience with the problems of achieving reliable and comparable data about social structures and political attitudes in Europe. The idea was thus to:

...chart stability and change in social structure, conditions and attitudes in Europe and to interpret how Europe’s social, political and moral fabric is changing ... and ... to achieve and spread higher standards of rigour in cross-national research in the social sciences, including

for example, questionnaire design and pre-testing, sampling, data collection, reduction of bias and the reliability of questions (European Social Survey 2015a).

These two main purposes differentiated the ESS from similar European social surveys in at least two respects. First of all, the ESS aimed to chart long-term changes, which distinguished it from the European Commission's Eurobarometer survey. In addition, the ESS' biannual setup, its focus on social policy issues, and its rotating module enabled it to address pressing political issues and placed it closer to policy issues than the EVS or ISSP. The issues taken up in the surveys were classical issues pertaining to social policy and comparative politics, ranging from political attitudes and media use to identity, religion, socio demographics and items about humans values. In this way, the ESS sought to provide data for established sub-fields, mainly in political science and sociology.

The second main idea guiding the project was its strong emphasis on high-quality data, rigor in methods and research in survey methodology. The project benefited from its initiators' experience with obtaining data in projects like Political Action (Barnes and Kaase 1979), the ISSP (Smith 2012) and Beliefs in Government (Kaase and Newton 1995). The ESS was to deliver high-quality data and, through methodological research, improve the general standard of social survey research in Europe. The emphasis on methods and techniques also served to legitimise the projects by drawing boundaries between rigorously produced survey data and other forms of social science knowledge production.

METHODS

As previously pointed out, 'methodological rigour' was the cornerstone of, and perhaps the most important way to, legitimise the ESS, as a consequence, methods and techniques were at its centre. In the blueprint written for the ESF Standing Committee for the Social Sciences in 1996, central decisions about methods and techniques were already taken (European Science Foundation, Standing Committee of the Social Science 1996). The blueprint outlined a model for a biannual survey with a core and rotating module, which would enable the ESS to address different themes in greater depth than was allowed for in the restricted core module. Since the first round in 2002, the rotating module has been dedicated to themes like migration, health, welfare state attitudes, family and work etc. (European Social Survey 2015b).

The scholars setting up the ESS shared a strong ambition to improve and standardise social survey research in Europe, from the construction of questionnaires through sampling, to archiving and documentation. In constructing the questionnaire, the ESS drew on established scales and items and a number of expert groups wrote recommendations both for themes and specific items and scales. The sources varied from Israeli psychologist Shalom Schwartz's Human Value Scale, through different items taken from social survey programs (such as the British Social Attitude Survey, International Social Survey Program) to ILO's classification standard for occupation (Erikson and Jonsson 2001; European Social Survey 2001). As a result, a number of items were dismissed due to their quality, and others were reformulated in order to live up to the common quality criteria. Likewise the Central Coordination Team established guidelines and criteria for the task of establishing sampling frames, survey organisations, translations and data management, and monitored and advised the national teams regarding the implementation of these criteria. Implementation was guided by the notion of equivalence. In practice, this meant that the survey did not have to be carried out in exactly the same manner in all countries, but the results—i.e. the data—

needed to be comparable and deviation had to be accounted for (Interview with member of the Central Scientific Team).

In selecting methods and techniques, the ESS balanced on a knife-edge. On one hand there was the survey's *raison d'être*: rigour in methods and the ambition to improve quality standards in social surveying. On the other, the surveys simultaneously had to produce results in the form of data every two years, and that data had to fit into established disciplinary frameworks, discussions and ways of producing social science knowledge, including the use of specific items and scales. Thus, in order to meet expectations from disciplinary environments, the ESS employed items and scales that did not always live up to the requirements of certain specialists.

INSTITUTIONS

Looking at the institutions that form the core of the ESS, we find primarily Western European universities and research institutions. In the last few years, both Eastern and Southern European institutions have been integrated into the organisation. Thus, the seven institutions that comprise the core scientific team today (2016) are: City University London (UK), NSD (Norway), GESIS (Germany), The Netherlands Institute for Social Research/SCP, (the Netherlands), Universitat Pompeu Fabra (Spain), University of Leuven (Belgium), and University of Ljubljana (Slovenia). However, much of the success in establishing the ESS was due to support from European institutions. Throughout its more than twenty-year history, the ESS has been closely connected to significant European scientific and political institutions. For example, the project was formally initiated by the ESF and the ESF also served as its secretariat and funded the first working groups that led to the blueprint in 1999 (European Science Foundation, Standing Committee of the Social Science 1996; European Science Foundation, Standing Committee of the Social Sciences 1999). Further, the ESF played an important role as the arena in which social scientists like Max Kaase and Robert Erikson could build networks. It also served as the institution linking the ESS to national funding agencies and, more importantly, to the European Commission's research policy bureaucracy. Thus, the ESF ensured and continuously reaffirmed the support from national funding agencies in setting up the survey *and* connected the ESS to the European Commission, both by influencing calls and by conveying the ESS' viewpoints to the EC research bureaucracy (Interview with member of expert group to the Social Sciences Standing Committee, ESF).

In a similar manner, after 2000, European institutions and political processes played an important role in institutionalising the ESS as a European research infrastructure. In the early 2000s, central researchers in the ESS worried that the dependence on short-term funding from national funding agencies and the European Framework Programmes was untenable if the ESS was to fulfil its ambition to provide data for long-term comparisons. In the eyes of the ESS, the project needed a funding base that was less dependent on shifting points of view in the European Commission and national research policies. Just as in the establishment of the project, a European institution became an important tool in changing the ESS' organisation and funding scheme. In the early 2000s, the issue of research infrastructures returned to the agenda of European research policies (Hallonsten 2014). Countries all over Europe found it increasingly difficult to fund and run large-scale research infrastructures, so the European Council established the ESFRI (European Strategy Forum on Research Infrastructures). In 2006, 2008 and 2010, the ESFRI published roadmaps with a view to endowing a number of existing and future research facilities with the qualities of research infrastructures (European Strategy Forum on Research Infrastructures 2006, 2008, 2010). Among the few social sciences and humanities projects was the ESS. The hope among the leaders of the ESS

and the head of the ESFRI Social Science and Humanities Section was that the EU would take over the funding of European research infrastructures, thereby simplifying their relationship to funders. However, in the end the solution became a consortium (called an ERIC, European Research Infrastructure Consortium) with member countries obliged to pay an annual fee covering the running costs of the infrastructure. This model was designed to secure long-term funding but, in many countries, it also meant that the source of funding for the ESS shifted from independent research funding agencies to the involved countries' ministries of research, thereby drawing the ESS closer to political institutions.

All in all, it is clear that connections to powerful European institutions—the ability to interact with them and to position the ESS in relation to them—and to European research policies are crucial in understanding the history and structure of the ESS.

CONTEXT

The context of the ESS and its institutional constellation are interrelated. Therefore large-scale changes in EU research policies and political setups influenced the political context in which the ESS was embedded and contributed to shaping the ESS and the knowledge it produces. Support for research had been a theme in European collaboration since the mid-1950s. Before the early 1980s, that support had primarily taken the form of intergovernmental institutions such as the CERN (1954), the European Science Foundation (1974) and the European University Institute (1976), but thereafter it was expressed through the Framework Programmes (Guzzetti 1995). The Framework Programmes primarily served as an economic instrument to support industry and agriculture, with only limited focus on social science issues and basic research. From the social sciences perspective, an important change was ushered in with the Maastricht Treaty in 1992. The Maastricht Treaty expanded the scope of the EU to include issues such as employment, life quality and social cohesion, all classical concerns in the social sciences. In this way, central concerns for the social sciences—and for the ESS—were slowly incorporated into the Framework Programmes from the forth Framework Program, which ran from 1994–1998 and thereafter with a focus on social integration and social exclusion in Europe (Schögler 2013). Hence, the ESS was established during a period in which issues central to the founders came onto the EU agenda as political issues, and when formal frameworks for supporting projects like the ESS were already in place.

In the process of turning the ESS into a European research infrastructure, it was influenced by large-scale changes that affected its organisation and knowledge production. The concerns about large-scale research infrastructures were in many ways closely connected to the political project of establishing a European Research Area as well as to the ambition in the Lisbon Declaration about turning Europe into the world's leading knowledge economy (De Elera 2006). The European Research Area was presented as a scientific equivalent to the European Single Market, ensuring the coordination and circulation of knowledge and research in Europe, which was intended to ensure better use of the resources invested in the sciences in Europe. Connected to this broad political ambition, the issue of the organisation and funding of research infrastructures arose in the early 2000s and the European Commission established an expert group to advise it on how to manage, fund and organise large-scale research infrastructures. The focus was primarily on large-scale facilities in the natural and technical sciences, such as observatories, research icebreakers and cyclotrons costing billions of Euros. Many countries found it increasingly hard to find ways to set up and fund such facilities, and a 'European solution' for research infrastructures fitted well with the political ambition to establish a European Research Area. In this process, the social sciences and

humanities were included as a subgroup. This subgroup was headed by Bjørn Henrichsen, Director of the NSD, who was one of the core members of the ESS in charge of data management and archiving (Interview with member of the Core Scientific Team). Once again, the ESS became closely entangled with important political processes and, throughout the late 2000s, the ESS prepared its organisation and practices to become a European Research Infrastructure. Again, political processes and concerns had shaped the organisation of the ESS.

The formation and internationalisation of the ESS can thus be seen as closely interwoven with political changes in Europe that offered a range of opportunities that the ESS could exploit due to its well-connected and powerful agents.

Concluding discussion: Changes and continuity

The two cases compared here provide an opportunity to understand the constellation of social survey knowledge in Europe and to discern how projects like the ESS and EVS have contributed to the emergence of a field of European social science knowledge production.

The two cases show how relatively successful social science projects are constructed in relation to different institutions and fields at the European level, and enable insights into the constellation of European social science knowledge production in the future. As the analysis shows, the five dimensions are often interwoven and, by way of conclusion, I will now discuss their interconnectedness in order to illustrate the constellation of the two surveys and the forms of knowledge production they represent. [Table 2](#) provides an overview of the main properties of the two surveys.

Table 2: Properties of the EVS and the ESS

	European Values Study	European Social Survey
Agents	Catholic-oriented academics and agents at the intersection of social science, politics and business	Northern European social scientists; specialist in survey research and quantitative methods, comparative politics and sociology
Ideas	Initially: anxiety about social change and European integration Later: Data provider	Providing high quality data for use in academic research Improving survey research in Europe
Methods	Survey, relying on local/national traditions/practices	Surveys, equivalence, centrally monitored techniques, documentation about production of the survey
Institutions	Think tanks, universities (mainly Catholic), Catholic church organisations. Increasingly university departments GESIS	ESF and national research councils, EU research funding agencies
Context	Western European ‘modernisation’, secularisation and changing values, end of the Cold War, increasing European collaboration	‘An integrating Europe’ Maastricht treaty => expansion of the Scope of the EU European Research Area European Research Infrastructure

At first glance, the two projects bear many similarities. Both are recognised as important European social surveys providing longitudinal data on central social science topics (Heath et al. 2005). Still,

the trajectory and constellation of the two surveys differs in important respects. Looking at the agents involved, we find that very different constellations of actors initiated the two surveys, and that they were guided by different ideas. Where the EVS was initiated by agents from different social fields, united by common political and ethical concerns—not least their connections to the Catholic Church—the ESS was cast as a scientific project and initiated by well-connected Northern European social scientists. Common to the two surveys is the fact that the agents who initiated them were well connected to both national and European institutions and commanded substantial institutional resources that they put to use in establishing the two surveys. But the social resources mobilised were quite different. For example, the two groups of founders looked rather different in terms of academic recognition. Where the ESS could mobilise renowned researchers within sociology and political science who commanded recognition and technical scientific resources, the initiators of the EVS were not recognised in the same way by their academic peers. The origins of the initiating agents and the ideas guiding the two surveys were, as we saw, closely connected. Thus, the EVS started out driven by strong political and ethical concerns about the consequences of the large-scale social changes that were sweeping through Europe, while the ESS' ambition was to advance social scientific knowledge production by providing high quality data and improving survey methods in Europe. This meant that the role played by methods was different in the two surveys. The EVS began by relying on established institutions (especially Gallup) and different national practices, and the ESS set itself the goal of establishing new standards for social surveys in Europe. In this way, rigour in methods and survey methodology research became the hallmark and main legitimisation of the ESS. Over time, concerns about methods have become a more central issue in the EVS and have transformed the survey's role, moving it towards becoming a data provider. As was the case for the agents, both surveys had strong ties to European and national institutions from the outset. The EVS was connected to a wide range of institutions ranging from universities and think tanks to opinion polling institutes, all connected through Catholic organisations and faith. On the other hand, from the very beginning the ESS was, well connected both to national and European scientific institutions (the ESF, research funding agencies, scientific associations etc.) and, through them, to the EU research bureaucracy. Throughout the ESS' history, this connection to EU institutions has been crucial in terms of obtaining funding—first through the Framework Programs and later as a research infrastructure—and for the institutional recognition of the project. Finally, let us turn to the context of the two surveys. Here, the changing political and social conditions in Europe have shaped how the EVS has framed its knowledge production and organisation. Thus, the fall of the Berlin Wall and end of the Cold War in around 1990 led to the expansion of the EVS into Eastern Europe and a number of publications on value systems and changes in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet countries. In contrast, in the case of the ESS the changes that have been most influential have been the changing constellation of the EU and EU research policy represent important contextual changes that made the ESS possible. Thus, the ESS can be understood as a manifestation of the political ambition to establish a European Research Area; not as the direct product of this, but as the outcome of an ongoing interaction with, and use of, the institutional openings offered by the political processes and academic agents guided by a specific vision of social science knowledge production.

All in all, the analysis shows that despite the apparent similarities between the two surveys, their constellation and trajectory differ, helping us to understand both their different modes of knowledge production and their ties to political institutions and processes in Europe. Both surveys were established by powerful agents and were associated with influential institutions—both at the national and European levels—and both mobilised recognised models in addressing pressing contemporary issues.

The analysis highlights two important aspects of the emergence of a field of European social sciences research: the first regarding the process of establishing European social science research projects; and the second concerning the kinds of knowledge production that become dominant at the European level. As the analysis shows, the two projects built on networks and relations with existing powerful institutions, suggesting that the emergence of a European field of social science tends to benefit agents and positions that already occupy dominant positions in national constellations of social science knowledge production. Likewise, regarding the forms of knowledge, we observe that both projects relied on well-established forms of knowledge production, methods and theoretical concepts. Thus, the process of establishing a European constellation or field of social science seems to be primarily characterised by a confirmation of the already dominant positions of the agents involved, as well as of particular theoretical conceptions and the survey method. Thus the two projects—despite their differences—both contribute to consolidating a particular mode of knowledge production as dominant within the emerging European field of social science. Remarkably, this form is quite similar to that which dominated the social sciences at national level in Europe in the post-war period, namely scientific, US-produced survey research (Steinmetz 2007). The question that thus arises is whether the emergence of a European field of social science research will lead to a narrowing of social science knowledge production, as occurred in the US after 1945, or to a more pluralistic constellation. Only time will tell.

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